Cults of Deities in Caves in Israel in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods

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Abstract

This article engages three deities, one Greek and two Oriental, that their cults were worshipped in caves during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The first deity is a Hellenistic terracotta figurine of Aphrodite, recovered from the prehistoric cave Me'arat ha-Nahal (Wadi el-Maghara) at the foot of Mount Carmel. It probably represents Aphrodite *Pandemos* (Ἀφροδίτη Πάνδημος) or Aphrodite *en Kepois* (Ἀφροδίτη ἐν Κήποις). It may be assumed that the cave, and its proximity to the city of Dor, was modified to serve as a cultic site or shrine. The second deity is represented by a sunken relief engraved on a rough rock surface adjacent to a cluster of 18 caves, known as "The Temple Cave" complex, along Keziv Stream (Nahal Keziv) in western Galilee. The largest and main cave in this complex seems to have had a cultic function in the Roman period, that is, it constituted a cultic site for a particular divinity. The sunken relief depicts a walking male military figure, dubbed "The Man in the Wall." Based on a comparative study and the figure's iconographic characteristics, we may identify it with *Sol Invictus Mithras*, a Late Roman-period deity, manifesting cultic pagan activity in a remote and isolated area, in the very heart of nature. The third deity is Ba'al Carmel (identified with Zeus/Jupiter) who was presumably worshipped in Elijah's Cave on the western slope of Mt. Carmel. Ba'al Carmel's visual representation, the depiction of a libation vessel and the presumed figure of a priest or, alternatively, an altar within an *aedicula* suggest it was used in the Roman period. Notably, one of the Greek inscriptions, dated to the Roman period, explicitly addresses the cave's sacred nature and the prohibition against its profanation.

Keywords: *aedicula*; Aphrodite *en Kepois*; Aphrodite *Pandemos*; *apoptygma*; Ba'al; *chiton*; emperor; *himation*; Keziv Stream; *lemnisci* (ribbons); Mount Carmel; *periskelis*; Phoenicia; "The Temple Cave"; "The Man in the Wall"; *Sol Invictus Mithras*.

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To date, three cave sites in Israel are known to have fulfilled cultic functions during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Of these, one was Greek and devoted to Aphrodite, and two were Oriental, venerating *Sol Invictus Mithras* and Baʿal Carmel.

Fig. 1. The Aphrodite terracotta figurine from Mt. Carmel, Israel (courtesy of the late Mrs. Inna Pomerantz, scientific secretary, Department of Antiquities and Museums, currently Israel Antiquities Authority).

1. Aphrodite

An Aphrodite terracotta figurine of excellent quality was found in the prehistoric cave Meʿarat ha-Nahal (Wadi el-Maghara) at the foot of western Mount Carmel.[1] It was published in 1934 by J. H. Iliffe and dated to the late 4th or 3rd century BCE (Iliffe 1934: 106–111; Fig. 1). The figurine is made of fine pinkish brown clay; it is headless, entirely nude and stands in a *contrapposto* pose on a roughly

1 With the base, the extant figurine is 37 cm high; without it, 31 cm high.

cut pedestal. The right arm is missing, but it may have been raised high above the figurine's head or outstretched (cf. Reinach 1965: 346 [Nos. 7, 8], 351 [Nos. 1, 2], 352 [No. 4], 353 [Nos. 1, 5], 354 [No. 5], 355 [No. 7]). The upper part of the left arm is preserved to the elbow, resting on an unidentified object supported by an Ionic column, most of which is lost.[2] The arm's missing part may have extended downwards, covering her genitals. Aphrodite is depicted wearing three ornaments: an anklet on her right ankle, a snake-shaped *periskelis* (περισκελίς) on her right thigh and a necklace with an attached pendant fitted closely around her neck.[3] The figurine's back is only roughly worked (Iliffe 1934: 106), and while the upper part is free-standing, the lower part, from the waist down, is in high relief. This type of Aphrodite figurine resembles works of the Praxitelean school (see also Iliffe 1934:107–109) and excels in its artistic quality.

A Greek inscription incised on the back of the figurine (Iliffe 1934: 106, 110) reads:

ΠΑΙΟ[ΝΙ]ΑC	Παι<ω>[νί]ας	Paionias
ΠΑΝΧΑΡΗC	πα<γ>χαρής	is very happy.

The inscription is obscure and thus curious. Perhaps, it was intended to express the owner's happiness, as a follower of the cult of Aphrodite *Pandemos* (Ἀφροδίτη Πάνδημος) or Aphrodite *en Kepois* (Ἀφροδίτη ἐν Κήποις; i.e., Aphrodite in the Gardens), as well as his joy in owning a nude figurine of the goddess of love, with its sensual and erotic connotations. Alternatively, perhaps the inscription refers to the "very happy" artist or artisan, proudly contemplating the beauty of his work.

Me'arat ha-Nahal cave may have served in the early Hellenistic period as a site of worship devoted to Aphrodite. If this is correct, the inhabitants of Hellenistic Dor, the largest and most important town in the region, ca. 10 km southwest, are likely to have been its primary customers.

An open-air precinct (*temenos*) discovered by Oscar Broneer in 1931, on the north slope of the Acropolis in Athens offers an interesting parallel (Broneer 1932: 31–55; Broneer 1933: 329–417; Broneer 1935:109–188; see also Rosenzweig 2004: 36–37). This precinct was dedicated to Aphrodite and Eros and included a cave where some of the cultic activity may have taken place. Broneer identified this sanctuary as the earlier of the two Athenian sanctuaries devoted to Aphrodite in the Gardens (Ἀφροδίτη ἐν Κήποις).[4]

2 For a similar albeit Doric column used as support for a figure, see Reinach 1965: 355 (No. 3).

3 For similar necklaces with an attached pendant, decorating goddess statuettes, see *LIMC* II/2: 163–164 (Nos. 107–108, 112).

4 The other later sanctuary was located near the Ilissos River and included a temple and the famous statue of Alkamenes (Broneer 1932: 52; Rosenzweig 2004: 30ff.). For the reference by ancient authors to this temple and Alkamenes' celebrated statue of Aphrodite without the walls, called the Aphrodite in the Gardens, see Pliny, *NH* 36.16; Pausanias, *Descr*. I.19.2.

Broneer also found among the votive niches two rock-cut inscriptions dedicated to Aphrodite and Eros (Broneer 1932: 42 [Fig. 9], 43–44, 46). Furthermore, several small sculptures were discovered at the sanctuary, including a nude torso of Aphrodite, a small votive marble plaque of Eros, and a small fragment of a marble relief, depicting two winged figures, most probably Erotes (Rosenzweig 2004: 37).

Aphrodite was worshipped in Athens both as Aphrodite *Pandemos* (Ἀφροδίτη Πάνδημος; Rosenzweig 2004: 14–16) and as Aphrodite *en Kepois* (Ἀφροδίτη ἐν Κήποις; Tsetskhladze and Kuznetsov 2000: 358). The latter may have derived from the Eastern goddess Ishtar and the Semitic Astarte (Rosenzweig 2004: 30), suggesting a connection with fertility for the sanctuary on the north slope of the Acropolis (Broneer 1932: 53; Rosenzweig 2004: 30, 40).

The precinct in Athens suggests that the Mount Carmel figurine represents Aphrodite *Pandemos* and/or Aphrodite *en Kepois* and that Me'arat ha-Naḥal cave was modified to serve as a cultic site or shrine, where various rites, including erotic-orgiastic rituals, were probably performed.[5]

2. Sol Invictus Mithras[6]

The so-called "The Temple Cave" or "El-Jalila Cave" (i.e., "The Sacred Cave") is the largest in a cluster of 18 karstic caves on the northern cliff of Keziv Stream (Nahal Keziv) in the western Galilee (Figs. 2, 3). Its huge, wide entrance is located at the base of the cliff, leading to a central chamber that measures 11 × 23 m with a ceiling up to 5.50 m high (Fig. 4). The floor is leveled and tamped, the ceiling is blackened with soot, and two boulders occupy the cave's rear (Fig. 5). On the left side of the entrance a smoothed semicircular niche is hewn into the rock (Fig. 6). The 18 caves were apparently inhabited in the Roman period, based on various items found inside them, especially pottery sherds.

5 The discovery of two Hellenistic terracotta heads of Aphrodite figurines in Dor may indicate that the goddess's cult operated in the city, possibly in the private sphere (Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009: 11, Figs. VIII, 8).

6 This section is based on a joint study with Yinon Shivtiel (Ovadiah and Shivtiel 2016). I thank Prof. Yinon Shivtiel for his agreement and permission to publish these extracts here.

Fig. 2. A view of the northern cliff of Nahal Keziv, featuring the cluster of 18 caves, including "The Temple Cave," and "The Man in the Wall" (in the red frame) (photo: Yinon Shivtiel).

Fig. 3. A view of the northern cliff of Nahal Keziv, featuring the cluster of 18 caves (in white ellipses) and "The Man in the Wall" (in the red frame) (photo: Yinon Shivtiel).

Fig. 4. The entrance to "The Temple Cave," facing north (photo: Kalil Adar).

Fig. 5. The boulders in the "The Temple Cave's" interior, facing north (photo: Kalil Adar).

Fig. 6. The semicircular niche on the left side of "The Temple Cave's" entrance (photo: Yinon Shivtiel).

Approximately 35 m east of "The Temple Cave," a 1.78 m tall military figure was engraved into the rock face. It was first recorded in the 1980s, during an archaeological survey in the western Galilee (Figs. 7–11; Frankel 1986: 51–52). Called "The Man in the Wall", the relief is rough and its artistic quality is relatively poor, probably due to the uneven rock surface with which the artist/artisan had to contend while engraving it. While it lacks softness and fineness, the figure has a spirited and vigorous appearance, expressing power, authority and decisiveness. The head and the lower part of the body are depicted in profile, facing west while the upper part (chest) is rendered frontally. It is barefoot and appears to be walking. The right foot is placed flat on the ground while the left foot has a slightly raised heel. The figure has a relatively large, squarish, and beardless head, a long sloping nose, a slightly open mouth, thin lips and a thick protruding chin. Importantly, unlike other artistic media, such as sculpture and coinage "The Man in the Wall" lacks identifying facial characteristics that may associate it with a specifiable person, such as a particular king or emperor.

Fig. 7. A view from below of the sunken relief figure engraved into the cliff's rockface, facing north (photo: Kalil Adar).

Fig. 8. An overview of the figure engraved into the cliff's rockface, facing north (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

Fig. 9. The engraved figure, facing north (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

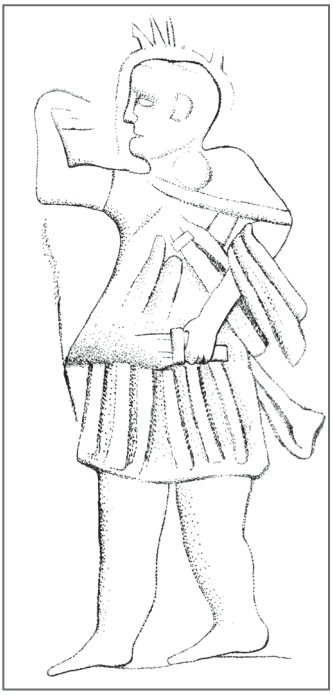

Fig. 10. Illustration of the sunken relief figure (Drawing: Sapir Haad).

Fig. 11. The upper part of the engraved figure; note the radiate crown (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

Nevertheless, the figure has at least five notable iconographic characteristics:

- An attire, comprising a *chiton* and a *himation*;
- The gesture of the raised right hand;
- The radiate (solar) crown;
- The walking posture;
- The beardless face.

The *chiton* (Hijmans 2009: 72 and n. 8, 74; Steyn 2012–13: 13)[7] was a typical garment of the time and an attribute of Sol/*Sol Invictus*.[8] The *chiton*'s lower part of "The Man in the Wall" is schematically and coarsely portrayed with six vertical folds. In the middle, it seems to have a fold around the waist, presumably to hold the garment in place, in a manner known in Classical Greek dress as *apoptygma* (ἀπόπτυγμα). Finally, the figure's right arm is bare, indicating that the *chiton* is

7 In the Roman mosaic pavement of Phaedra and Hippolytos, found in Antioch, the latter wears a *chiton*, with an overfold at the waist (*apoptygma* – ἀπόπτυγμα) and a *chlamys* or *himation* fastened on his left shoulder with a *fibula*, as in our case (Cimok 2000: 77).

8 For the epithet *invictus* for Sol, see Berrens 2004: 184–198; Hijmans 2009: 18–27. For a review of the theories on the origin, character and significance of *Sol Invictus*, see Hijmans 1996: 115–150. For the representation of emperor/Sol in Roman art and the significance of Helios/Sol and Emperor, as a symbol of victorious royalty and apotheosis, see *LIMC* IV/1: 619–622.

short-sleeved. The figure also wears a *himation* (a cloak) clearly distinguished from the *chiton* below by a thick layer of folded fabric on the chest. It is fastened with a *fibula* and hangs behind the figure, covering the left shoulder and upper arm. Its train passes beneath the left arm-pit and wraps around the left arm and forearm. This *himation*, presented in the form of a *chlamys*, is a characteristic garment and attribute of Sol/*Sol Invictus* (Hijmans 2009: 74; Bardill 2012: 52).

Two or three fingers of the left hand are discernible, apparently holding the hilt of a dagger, horizontally positioned above the *apoptygma*. The figure also carries a long sword with two decorative pompons on its upper part.

The right hand is raised above the shoulder and positioned in front of the face with the seemingly open(?) palm facing inwards. The elbow is bent ca. 90° and the forearm is demonstratively and authoritatively held upright (Figs. 8–11). While the meaning of this gesture has been the subject of much debate (Matern 2002: 129–147 and references therein), it is widely agreed today that the raised right hand gradually evolved into a gesture of power characteristic of Sol/*Sol Invictus*, presumably signifying the link between the god's image and the viewer (Cumont 1923: 69–72; L'Orange 1935: 93–94; Hijmans 1996: 124–125; Matern 2002: 129–147; Hijmans 2009: 73–74, 90–96). This development unfolded over the course of the 2nd century CE and became standard in the later Imperial period (i.e., 3rd–4th centuries CE; Hijmans 2009: 90, 92),[9] primarily when represented as a full-length walking figure, as in the case discussed here.[10]

Notwithstanding slight differences, the radiate crown adorning the figure's head (Figs. 8–11) was a common attribute on Roman coinage, associated with both Sol and the emperor (Hijmans 2009: 82–84, 515–521; see also Hijmans 2006: 440–443).[11] However, the absence of a fillet and *lemnisci* (ribbons) at the back of the

9 L'Orange (1935: 93–94) considered that this gesture served to differentiate the new oriental (Syrian) sun-god, *Sol Invictus* from the old Roman sun-god, *Sol Indiges* (cf. Matern 2002: 134–136; Steyn 2012–13: 6, 9, 10).

10 On this gesture in various artistic media of Roman art, see *LIMC* IV/2: Nos. 27, 93, 97,101, 105, 106, 116, 118–120, 160, 172, 203, 230, 233, 290, 313–415. Notable additional depictions of *Sol Invictus* include a wooden fragmentary Roman zodiac (3rd century CE?) from Caesarea Maritima (Ovadiah and Mucznik 1996: 375–380) and the zodiac of the synagogue mosaic pavement at Hammath Tiberias (mid–4th century CE; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pls. LXVI–LXVII[1], CLXXX–CLXXXI). Furthermore, the outstretched hand gesture is also typical of many equestrian statues of the Roman emperor, expressing power, sovereignty, authority, blessing or salutation (see, for instance, the statue of Marcus Aurelius in Piazza di Campidoglio, Rome; Hanfmann n.d.: Colour Pl. III [on p. 39]; Kleiner 1992: Fig. 236 [on p. 272]).

11 For the depiction of the emperor with a radiate crown on Roman coinage, see Carson 1962: Pls. 1–47 (*passim* – from Severus Alexander to Balbinus and Pupienus); Carson 1990: Pls. 4 (48 – Nero), 9 (119 – Vespasian), 11 (144 – Trajan), 18 (254, 256 – Caracalla), 19 (263 – Elagabalus), 21 (297 – Balbinus; 298 – Pupienus; 299, 300, 303 – Gordian III), 22 (304, 305 – Gordian III; 308, 310, 312, 313 – Philip I; 309 – Philip II), 23 (316 – Pacatian; 317 – Jotapian; 318, 321, 323 – Trajan Decius; 324 – Herennius Etruscus; 326 – Divus Vespasian; 327–328 – Hostilian; 329 – Trebonianus Gallus), 24 (330–333 – Voluvian; 334 – Galus; 335, 336, 338 – Aemilian; 341 – Valerian I; 344 – Valerian II), 25 (345, 349, 354, 358 – Gallienus; 346, 348, 351, 355, 356 – Valerian I; 350 – Divus Valerian II; 359 – Saloninus), 26 (364, 365 - Macrian; 366 – Regalian; 369, 372, 374 – Gallienus), 27 (376, 377, 379–384, 386 – Gallienus), 28 (392–396 – Claudius II; 398–401 – Quintillus; 402–404 – Divus Claudius; 408 – Postumus), 29 (410–412, 414 – Postumus; 416 – Laelian; 418, 419 –

head suggests that "The Man in the Wall" be identified with Sol (Hijmans 2009: 412–416, 418, 421, 430–431, 433–434, 438, 442, 444, 446–454, 515–516). In his *Hymn to King Helios*, emperor Julian the "Apostate" (361–363 CE) describes the physical qualities of the sun-god and calls him "… the King of the All, Helios, …" (… παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν ὅλων λίῳ, ...) or "… Helios, the King of the All …" (... τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν ὅλων Ἡλίῳ … or ... τὸν βασιλέα τῶν ὅλων … Ἥλιον, …) (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios*, pp. 374–375, 408–409, 414–415, 424–425, 428–429, 432–433), etc. W. C. Wright (Julian, *Hymn to King Helios*, 348–349), who translated Julian's work, made in his introduction to *Oratio* IV the following observation: "It is Mithras, the Persian sun-god, rather than Apollo, whom Julian identifies with his 'intellectual god' Helios, and Apollo plays only a minor part among his manifestation." [For the Romans, the cult of Mithras] "supplied the ideals of purity, devotion and self-control which the other cults had lacked. The worshippers of Mithras were taught to contend against the powers of evil, submitted themselves to a severe moral discipline, and their reward after death was to become as pure as the gods to whom they ascend." [Notably, it was Iamblichus, ca. 250–325 CE, the Syrian Neoplatonist philosopher who] "had imported into the Neo-Platonic system the intermediary world of intellectual gods (νοεροὶ θεοί). On them, Helios-Mithras, their supreme god and centre, bestows the intelligence and creative and unifying forces that he has received from his transcendental counterpart among the intelligible gods."

Crucially, the relationship between Mithras and *Sol Invictus* was intricate and delicate. On the one hand, they were two different and independent divinities, but, on the other hand, they overlapped and shared many cultic features (Halsberghe 1972: 119–120). Sol/*Sol Invictus* played a prominent role in the Mithraic mysteries and was equated with Mithras himself. Moreover, "… although Mithraic iconography clearly and consistently portrays Mithras and Helios as separate

Marius; 421, 422, 424, 425 – Victorinus), 30 (431 – Petricus I; 432, 433 – Petricus II; 435–437, 441, 442, 444–446 – Aurelian), 31 (447, 448, 450–453, 455–457 – Aurelian; 459 – Vabalathus), 32 (463, 464 – Aurelian; 467, 468, 470, 472, 478 – Tacitus), 33 (479, 481–483 – Florian; 486, 491, 493, 494 – Probus), 34 (498, 501 – Probus; 504, 505 – Carus; 507 – Carinus), 35 (511, 517 – Divus Carus; 512 – Divus Nigrinian; 516 – Carus and Carinus; 520 – Numerian; 523 – Julian), 36 (525 – Galerius; 527, 532, 534, 538 – Maximian; 528, 529, 533 – Diocletian; 530, 531 – Constantius I), 37 (540–543, 546 – Carausius; 552–555 – Allectus), 44 (651 – Constantine I); Hijmans 2003: 382–383, n. 17; Hijmans 2009: 422, 426–430, 432–443, 446; Shotter 2011: Pls. 1.6, 1.8–1.11, 1.23, 3.14–3.16; Steyn 2012–13: 54–55, Figs. 7, 8, 15–20, 22–24, 26, 27, 29–32, 34–36, 40, 41; cf. also Cumont 1956a: 99–100, 184–186; Bardill 2012: Figs. 34, 36 (on p. 48), 38, 39 (on pp. 50–51), 41 (on p. 53), 42 (on p. 54), 43, 44 (on p. 55), 45 (on p. 56), 46, 47 (on p. 57), 50 (on p. 61). For depictions of emperors wearing the radiate crown on objects other than coins (e.g., statues, cameos and gems), see Bergmann 1998: Tafeln 21 (1, 3–4), 22, 24, 45 (1), 52 (1, 6), 55 (1–3). Halsberghe (1972: 155) states that "up to the conversion of Constantine the Great, the cult of Deus Sol Invictus received the full support of the emperors. The many coins showing the sun god that these emperors struck provide official evidence of this. The cult of Deus Sol Invictus completely satisfied the religious convictions of the Romans. From the end of the third century on, religious syncretism, perfectly embodied by the cult of Deus Sol Invictus, was the ideal of both the masses and the intellectuals." A little further on, Halsberghe (1972: 169) claims "that the custom that representing Deus Sol Invictus on coins came to an end in A.D. 323.

divinities, there are also numerous inscriptions in which Mithras is himself called 'the unconquered sun' (*sol invictus*)" (Ulansey 1989: 107; see also Alvar 2008: 100). This coupling was manifested in various votive inscriptions: *Sol Invictus Mithras*, *Deus Sol Invictus Mithras*, *Deus Sol Mithras*, and *Sol Mithras* (Clauss 2000: 146; Turcan 2000: 224; Hijmans 2009: 185; Forsythe 2012: 136; see also Cumont 1956b: 146; Cumont 1963: 136).[12] However, the relation of the Mithraic *Sol Invictus* to the public cult of the deity with the same name is unclear and perhaps non-existent (cf. Alvar 2008: 203). In any case, in the Mithraic context, *Sol Invictus* is depicted undertaking various activities and, according to some scholars, is to be identified with Mithras (Cumont 1956a: 188; Halsberghe 1972: 45, n. 1), although there is lack of agreement regarding this issue (Halsberghe 1972: 117–122).

Another significant matter of interest is that the cult of Mithras was practiced in cave-temples or secret chapels. Quoting the lost work of Euboulos, Porphyry mentions a pertinent case: "First of all, according to Eubulus, Zoroaster consecrated a natural cave in the mountains near Persia, a flowery cave with springs, to the honor of Mithras, the creator and father of the universe (εἰς τιμὴν τοῦ πάντων ποιητοῦ καὶ πατρὸς Μίθρου), since the cave was for him an image of the cosmos that Mithras created (εἰκόνα φέροντος αὐτῷ τοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ κόσμου, ὅν ὁ Μίθρας ἐδημιούργησε). The objects arranged symmetrically within the cave were symbols of the elements and regions of the cosmos" (Porphyry, *De Antro* 6 [Lamberton 1983: 25]; see also Clauss 2000: 42, 67–68 [Fig. 28]; Beck 2006: 6, 81–87). Thus, the *Mithraeum* (i.e., the Mithraic temple) imitates the cave where Mithras killed the bull, and the rock symbolizes the universe (*cosmos*), recalling either the mythical cave where the bull-slaying (*tauroctony*) occurred or the *Mithraeum*-cave where the rites and rituals were practiced (Clauss 2000: 65; Alvar 2008: 81).[13] Moreover, literary sources and visual works of art inform us that Mithras was miraculously born from a rock.[14] Thus, one inscription reads: *D*(*eo*) *O*(*mnipotenti*) *S*(*oli*) *Invi*(*cto*), *Deo Genitori*, *r*(*upe*) *n*(*ato*); that is, "To the almighty God Sun invincible, generative god, born from the rock" (Clauss 2000: 62).

12 Hijmans (2009: 166) claims that "In his name *Sol Invictus Mithras* is normally treated as one deity, but in Mithraic art *Sol* and *Mithras* are invariably depicted as two separate ones." Furthermore, Beck (2006: 5–6, 10–11, 81–85) proposes two axioms for the Mithraic mysteries.

13 Clauss (2000: 42) states that "because Mithras killed the bull in a cave, his followers likewise performed the ritual reproduction of this saving act in a cave, or rather in a shrine which reproduced that cave, in a *spelaeun* ('cave')."

14 It should be pointed out that, curiously, only Christian authors mention the rock-birth of Mithras. Here are several examples: … ἐκ πέτρας γεγενῆσθαι αὐτὸν, … ("… he was born from a rock, …" [Justin, *Dial. Tryph.*70.1]); *Invictus de petra natus si deus habetur* ("The unconquered one was born from a rock, if he is regarded as a god" [Commodian, *Instr.* 1.13]); θεὸς ἐκ πέτρας … ("… god from a rock …" [Iulius Firmicus Maternus, *De Errore* 20.1]); …, ὥσπερ τὸν πετρογενῆ Μίθραν … ("…, like Mithras, who was born from the rock …" [Johannes Lydus, *De Mens.* III.26]). For a discussion of the rock-birth of Mithras and its representations in monuments, see Vermaseren 1951: 285–301; Cumont 1956a: Figs. 30, 31; Merkelbach 1984: 96–98, Abb. 46, 48, 68, 97, 158; Ulansey 1989: Ill. 3.7 (p. 36); Clauss 2000: 62–71, Ills. 23–30, 32.

We may draw the following conclusions:

The complex of the 18 caves, associated with "The Man in the Wall," was used for habitation during the Middle and Late Roman periods;

The abovementioned five iconographic characteristics of the rock-carved figure and "The Temple Cave" suggest that the "The Man in the Wall" be identified with a deity, specifically with *Sol Invictus Mithras*. This identification is supported by the sword and possibly the dagger used for the bull-slaying (*tauroctony*; Alvar 2008: Pl. 14 [on p. 452]).

"The Temple Cave" seems to have functioned as a *Mithraeum*, where the inhabitants of the other caves and from the area nearby performed rites and rituals, venerating and worshipping *Sol Invictus Mithras*.

"The Man in the Wall" and the religious-cultic activity performed in "The Temple Cave" can be dated between the end of the 2nd and early 4th centuries CE.

The identification of "The Man in the Wall" with *Sol Invictus Mithras* indicates that cultic pagan activity was performed in a *Mithraeum*, located in a large cave ("The Temple Cave"), in an isolated and a remote area in the heart of nature and far from urban centres.

3. Ba'al Carmel

On one occasion, the Bible refers to Mountt Carmel as *Carmelus Maris* (... καὶ συνάψει τῷ Καρμήλῳ κατὰ θάλασσαν ...; ... ופגע בכרמל הימה ... [Josh 19:26; see also Septuagint, Josh 19:26]), in order to distinguish it from another mountain of the same name in the south of the Land of Israel. What has given northern Mount Carmel everlasting renown is Elijah the Prophet's sojourn and the wonders he wrought there. It even received, in the local vernacular, the name of *Jebel Mar Elias*, the Mountain of St. Elijah. According to the biblical story, during the reign of King Ahab (9th century BCE), an altar to Ba'al was placed beside the altar to the true God at the top of Mount Carmel. Ba'al's prophets performed his rites and served the venerating pagan population. These events occurred under the direction of Jezebel, daughter of the King of Sidon and wife of Ahab, leading the populace astray to idolatry. In response, Prophet Elijah gathered on Mount Carmel "all Israel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table" (1 Kgs 18:19). After demonstrating the powerlessness of the false god, Elijah placed a sacrifice (a bull) on the altar and called upon the Lord. Immediately fire rained down from the heavens and consumed the bull. Witnessing this miracle, the people claimed Jehovah as their God; and, at Elijah's orders, took the prophets of Ba'al to the Kishon river, where they were executed (1 Kgs 18: 15–40; Ap-Thomas 1960: 146–155).[15]

15 See also the third-century CE wall paintings in the synagogue at Dura-Europos. They are based on Biblical, *Midrashic* (Jewish legends), and Christian (Church Fathers) sources (Sukenik 1947: 138–142, Figs. 50, 51; Kraeling 1956: 137–143, Pls. LXI, LXII).

This story echoes the conflict between monotheism and paganism in the Land of Israel, in general, and Mount Carmel, in particular. The confrontation of the Prophet Elijah with Ba'al's prophets also testifies to the mountain's sanctity and religious importance, communicating with various pagan cultic sites, altars, temples or shrines that persisted on Mount Carmel until Late Antiquity.

Iamblichus calls Mount Carmel "… a mountain most holy among the others (and) inaccessible to many, …" (… τοῦ Καρμήλου λόφου [ἱερώτατον δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ὀρῶν ἠπίσταντο αὐτὸ καὶ πολλοῖς ἄβατον, …]; Iamblichus, *De Vita* 3.15).

It is therefore curiously that the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 CE), although passing by Mount Carmel, failed to mention Elijah's Cave. Perhaps, he had insufficient information or was too distant from the cave itself. He only writes briefly (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 585.1):

> … *ibi est mons Carmelus, ibi Helias sacrificium faciebat* …
>
> … there is Mount Carmel, there Elijah sacrificed …

Geopolitically, from the Hellenistic period onwards, Mount Carmel, including Elijah's Cave, belonged to Phoenicia, as Josephus stated (Josephus, *J.W.* 3.35):

> Δύο δ' οὔσας τὰς Γαλιλαίας, τήν τε ἄνω καὶ τὴν κάτω προσαγορευομένην, περιίσχει μὲν ἡ Φοινίκη τε καὶ Συρία, διορίζει δὲ ἀπὸ μὲν δύσεως ἡλίου Πτολεμαΐς τοῖς τῆς χώρας τέρμασι καὶ Κάρμηλος, τὸ πάλαι μὲν Γαλιλαίων, νῦν δὲ Τυρίων ὄρος.
>
> Galilee, with its two divisions known as Upper and Lower Galilee, is enveloped by Phoenicia and Syria. Its western frontiers are the outlying territory of Ptolemais (Acre/Acco. – AO) and Carmel, a mountain once belonging to Galilee, and now to Tyre.

According to Eusebius, by the Late Roman period, Mount Carmel constituted a border between Eretz Israel and Phoenicia (Eusebius, *Onom.* 118. 8–9):

> <Κάρμηλος. ὄρος> ἐπὶ τὸ Φοινίκιον πέλαγος καὶ διαιροῦν Παλαιστίνην Φοινίκης. Ἔνθα ἐκαθέζετο Ἠλίας.
>
> Karmelos. A mountain on the Phoenician Sea and which divides Eretz Israel from Phoenicia. Here Elijah dwelt.

Whereas Eusebius does not indicate which region the mountain belonged to, his contemporary, Iamblichus, unequivocally states that the mountain was Phoenician

territory (Iamblichus, *De Vita* 3.14; see also Clark 1989: 6–7).[16] This geopolitical connection with Phoenicia and its main cities (Gebal/Byblos, Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut) was also religious, and Phoenician cults probably inspired those practiced on Mount Carmel and in Elijah's Cave.

Following the historical context, the discussion will now engage with the cave's key features as a place of worship dedicated to Ba'al Carmel. These features include relevant literary sources, the cave's formal properties, pertinent inscriptions engraved on the cave walls, and a large statue fragment that may have been placed nearby.

Several contemporaneous literary sources provide evidence for the veneration and worship of Ba'al Carmel on Mount Carmel.

Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.78) speaks of an open-air altar for Ba'al Carmel, emphasizing that the god had no image or temple, but only a site of worship (i.e., an altar):

> *Est Iudaeam inter Syriamque Carmelus: ita vocant montemdeumque. Nec simulacrum deo aut templum – sic tradidere maiores -: ara tantum et reverentiae.*
>
> Between Judea and Syria lies Carmel: this is the name given to both the mountain and the divinity. The god has no image or temple – such is the rule handed down by the fathers; there is only an altar and the worship of the god.

Tacitus seems to have been unaware of Mount Carmel, Elijah's Cave, the cult statue of Ba'al Carmel, presumably located inside it, or the cult and rites practiced there. Apparently, he himself never visited this part of the Roman Empire and must have obtained the information on the altar from secondary sources.[17] Perhaps, the altar without any image (idol) or temple of the god on Mount Carmel, described by Tacitus, was associated with the Madbah epithet, such as Ζεὺς Μάδβαχος, referring to the 'altar' (Zeus the Altar), that listened to prayers (Weinreich 1912: 34). It is equivalent to βωμὸς ἐπήκοος (Weinreich 1912: 30), namely, the altar that listens to prayers.

Tacitus, who especially stresses the non-figural (aniconic) character of the god (Ba'al Carmel?) in his time (second half of the 1st century CE, when he wrote

16 In the annals of Shalmaneser III, King of Assyria, referring to his invasion to Eretz Israel in 841 BCE, the western edge of Mount Carmel, where Elijah's Cave is located, is mentioned as Ba'al-Rosh (*Mount Ba'alira'asi, which is a cape* [*jutting out into*] *the sea before the land of Tyre*); see Aharoni 1965: 56–62; Kirk Grayson 1996: 54). It seems that in biblical times, Mount Carmel was on the border between Israel and Phoenicia, but it is unclear to which of the regions it belonged.

17 Alternatively, Avi-Yonah (1952: 119) argued that the passage by Tacitus proves that the colossal statue of Ba'al/Zeus/Jupiter of the Carmel, of which only a fragment remains, was created after Tacitus had written the *Historiae*, and thus he provides us with a helpful *terminus a quo*.

the *Histories*), also mentions the local oracle in connection with the consultation provided to Vespasian (Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.78):

Illic sacrificanti Vespasiano, cum spes occultas versaret animo Basilides sacerdos inspectis identidem extis "Quicquid est" inquit, "Vespasiane, quod paras, seu domum extruere seu prolatare agros sive ampliare servitia, datur tibi magna sedes, ingentes termini, multum hominum."

When Vespasian was sacrificing there and thinking over his secret hopes in his heart, the priest Basilides, after repeated inspection of the victim's vitals, said to him, "Whatever you are planning, Vespasian, whether to build a house, or to enlarge your holdings, or to increase the number of your slaves, the god grants you a mighty home, limitless bounds, and a multitude of men."

Suetonius confirmed Tacitus's testimony, stating that Vespasian consulted the oracle of the god of Carmel in Judaea (Suetonius, *De Vita* 8.5.6 [*Vespasian*]):

Apud Iudaeam Carmeli dei oraculum consulentem ita confirmavere sortes, ut quidquid cogitaret volveretque animo quamlibet magnum, id esse proventurum pollicerentur.

When he consulted the oracle of the god of Carmel in Judaea, the lots were highly encouraging, promising that whatever he planned or wished, however great it might be, would come to pass.

The 5th-century Christian historian Orosius is the last of the ancient writers to mention the oracle on Mount Carmel (Orosius, 7.9; Deferrari 1981: 301; see also Baudissin 1911: 234–235, n. 6):

> *…, Iudaei post passionem Christi destituti in totum gratia Dei cum omnibus undique malis circumuenirentur, quibusdam in Carmelo Monte seducti sortibus, quae portenderent exortos a Iudaea duces rerum potituros fore, praedictumque ad se trahentes in rebellionem exarserunt …*
>
> …, the Jews, after the Passion of Christ, being completely destitute of the grace of God and, when they were beset by all evils on all sides, being led astray by certain oracular responses on Mount Carmel which predicted that leaders coming out of Judea would take possession of things, and applying the prediction to themselves, [the Jews] broke out in rebellion …

The mention of the oracle on Mount Carmel by Tacitus, Suetonius and Orosius, as well as the epigraphic evidence (see below), may imply that pagan worship was practiced in Elijah's Cave during the first centuries CE.

Although the cult of Baʿal was practiced on Mount Carmel as early as the 9th century BCE and persisted into the Roman period, we have no literary or historical sources mentioning Elijah's Cave before the 12th century CE. We would have expected, for instance, the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 CE) to have said something about it. However, as noted above, he only mentions Mount Carmel without referring to Elijah's Cave (*Itinerarium Burdigalense*, 585.1).

Elijah's Cave is situated on the western slope of Mount Carmel, facing the sea (Figs. 12–15). It has been the object of intensive and extensive investigations carried out by the author since 1966. In the course of these investigations hundreds of inscriptions, engraved on the cave walls, were uncovered and documented, including 225 in Greek, one in Latin, two in Arabic, and approximately 48 in Hebrew (Ovadiah and Pierri 2015).[18]

Fig. 12. An aerial view of the northwest ridge of Mount Carmel, facing southwest; note Elijah's Cave at the bottom and Stella Maris monastery and lighthouse at the top (photo: courtesy of biblewalks.com).

18 Recently, restorations were carried out in the cave, including the renewed cleaning of its walls, in order to "re-read," "re-examine," and "re-investigate" the inscriptions, with the intension of republishing the epigraphic material in the fifth volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*.

Fig. 13. An early 20th-century view of the northwest ridge of Mount Carmel, facing south; note Elijah's Cave at the base (photo: courtesy of Prof. Dan Adler, Haifa).

Fig. 14. The northwest ridge of Mount Carmel, facing southeast; note Elijah's Cave at the bottom and Stella Maris monastery at the top (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

Fig. 15. The buildings in front of Elijah's Cave, facing southeast (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

The cave is shaped like a parallelogram and oriented south-southwest to north-northeast, measuring 14.5 × 8.7 × 4.5–5.0 m (Figs. 16–20). The cave's ceiling is rough due to the crumbling of the soft limestone rock over the years, but its walls are smooth. It appears to be a modified natural cave that was elaborated, enlarged and adapted for religious purposes, presumably for the worship of Ba'al Carmel.[19] A cornice with a groove constitutes a decorative band along most of the top of the south, east and west walls. It is covered with soot and is virtually indistinguishable. As the cave was enlarged and modified, its floor seems to have been lowered by ca. 0.50 m. Originally, it sloped south, from the opening in the north, following the rock's inclination indicated by: (a) a southwardly inclined fracture in the west wall and (b) rough and irregular cuts on the sides of the wall below the fracture. The cave's natural opening, which was large and irregular, 3.50 m high and ca. 4 m wide, was also modified. Its eastern half was blocked, narrowing the entrance to ca. 2 m. Consequently, the cave is presently entered through the western half of the north wall. West of the entrance, the inner face of the northern wall measures 2 m and 4.2 m east of the entrance (cf. Friedman 1979: 140).

19 Guérin and Meistermann also believed the cave was originally natural: "Si elle était d'abord naturelle, elle a été ensuite agrandie et régularisée par la main de l'homme" (Guérin 1875 [1969]: 273); "An artificial regularity has been given to its shape, and its walls are covered with a coating upon which innumerable pilgrims - Greek, Latin, Arabian, etc. - have cut their names and invocations" (Meistermann 1923: 435). Friedman (1979: 139, 145), conversely, is of the opinion that the cave is wholly artificial.

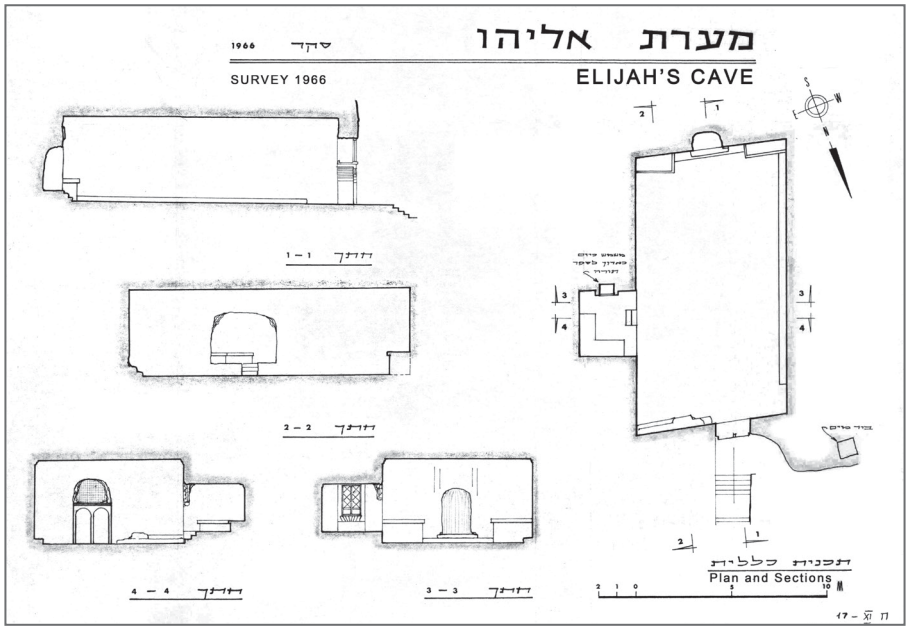

Fig. 16. Elijah's Cave, plan and sections (Drawing: Raphael Floresheim).

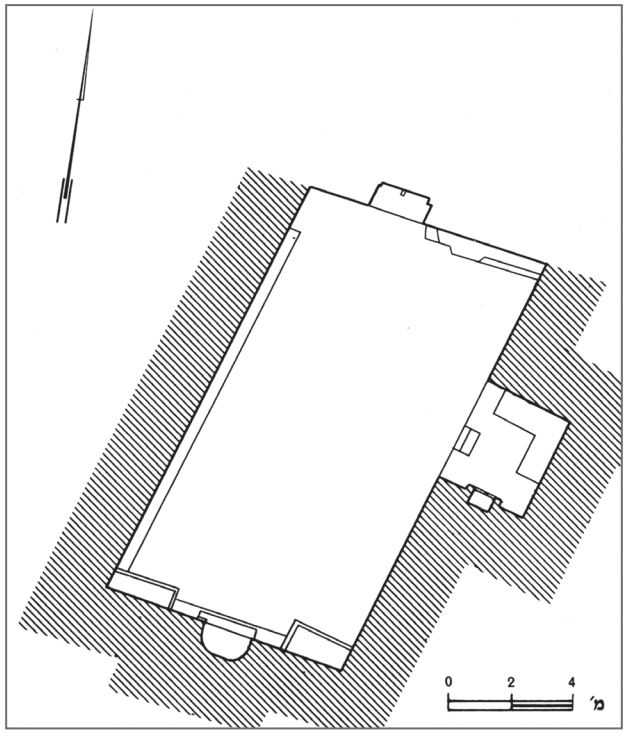

Fig. 17. Elijah's Cave, plan (Drawing: Raphael Floresheim).

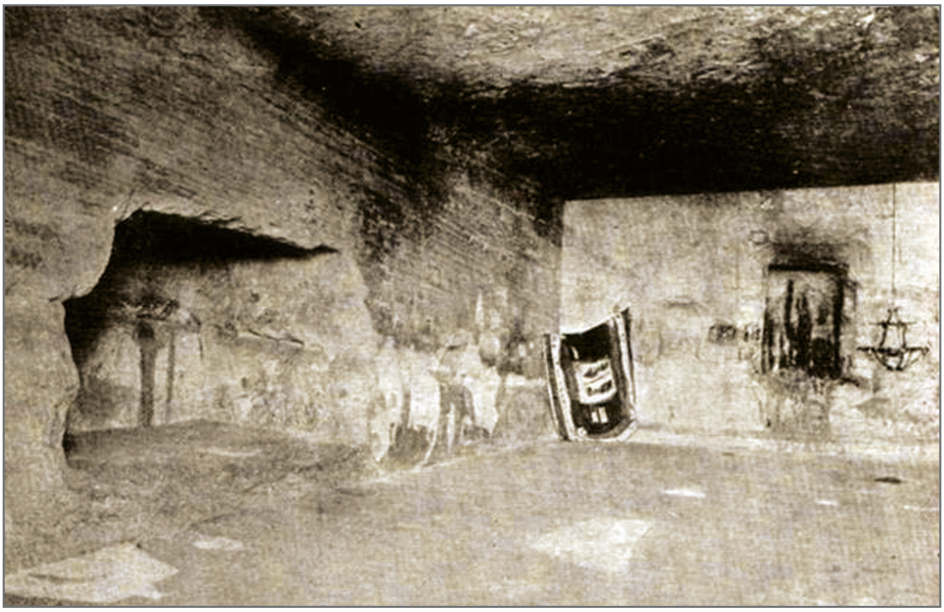

Fig. 18. A 1893 photograph of the cave's interior, facing south (photo: courtesy of Prof. Dan Adler, Haifa).

Fig. 19. A 1910 photograph of the cave's interior, facing southeast (photo: courtesy of Prof. Dan Adler, Haifa).

Fig. 20. A contemporary photograph of the cave's interior, facing south-southwest (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

The south wall is rough, and the soft rock seems to have crumbled away. It features a semicircular niche, topped with a carved conch, 1 m in diametre and 0.42 m high (Figs. 21, 22). In turn, the conch is crowned with a plastered rectangular recess, ca. 0.70 m high and ca. 0.50 m deep, forming an integral part of the semicircular niche (Fig. 23).[20] The niche is enclosed in a double-stepped frame. The inner frame is 9 cm wide, whereas the outer frame is 8 cm wide and protrudes a few centimetres beyond the inner one. Remains of carved motifs are observed on either side of the frame, set in vertical (0.31 m wide), flat panels. Unfortunately, only their upper part is preserved, and the eastern panels are in better condition than the western ones. Notwithstanding, there is every indication that the decoration would have been the same on both sides. The panels are placed one above the other and separated with carved, 2–3 cm thick, horizontal bands. The upper and lower panels feature a scale motif, forming a continuous geometric pattern, while the middle panel depicts a vessel, perhaps a *kylix* (0.31 m high),

20 Friedman (1979: 142) argued that the semicircular niche presents two stages of carving: (a) a rectangular recess, perfectly regular in shape, to house a cult statue (idol); (b) a superimposed irregularly shaped niche, dated to 1635 CE, that served as a *mihrab*.

rendered two-dimensionally. On the western side of the semicircular niche, only the upper and middle panels are partially observable, depicting the scale motif and the ribbed body of another similar vessel, respectively (Figs. 23–25). Additionally, two vertical elongated depressions, 0.44 m wide and 3 m long, flanked the niche's decorative frames (today partially covered with plaster; Fig. 26). Perhaps, they originally held decorative pillars of stucco, wood, or stone.[21]

Fig. 21. The semicircular niche topped with a conch, facing south (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

21 See, for example, the false pillars flanking rock-hewn, conch-topped niches at Paneas/Banias, producing the appearance of a temple façade (*aedicula*; Ovadiah and Turnheim 2011: Pls. IIIa, IVb, V).

Fig. 22. The semicircular niche and conch, facing southwest (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

Fig. 23. The rectangular recess above the semicircular niche (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

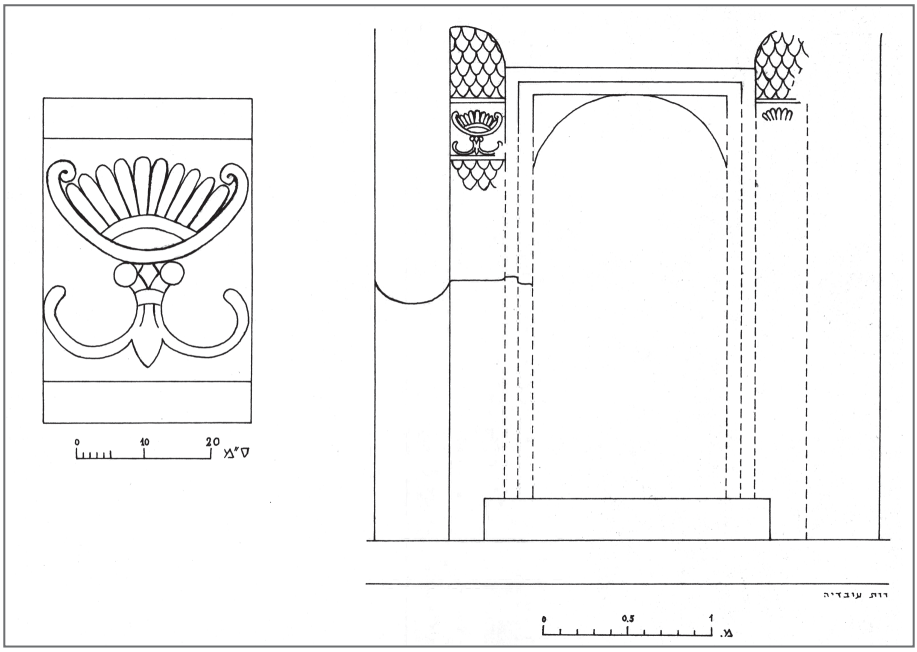

Fig. 24. Illustration of the semicircular niche and associated decorations (Drawing: Ruth Ovadiah).

Fig. 25. The decorated panels on the semicircular niche's left-hand side (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

Fig. 26. The elongated, partially plastered over, vertical depression on the semicircular niche's left-hand side (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

The vessel, in the panel mentioned above, has three tall legs bound in the middle by a ring or ribbon. Two legs are shown in profile with an inward-turning spiral, while the third is shown frontally, in an unsuccessful attempt to render perspective. Towards the top of the legs, beneath the vessel's body, are two round stylized "buttons."[22] The vessel's body has a deep, concave outline depicted in a flat, stylized manner with ten vertical ribs represented by pronounced incisions. It ends on both upper sides with a spiral-shaped brim. Some of these features—the curved

22 See three coins from the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE) depicting cups with two dots beneath the rim (Meshorer 1966: 113, Pl. XIX [Nos. 148–150]).

legs, round "buttons," ribbed body, and spiral-shaped brim—suggest an imitation of a metal vessel. In other words, the craftsman had apparently envisaged a metal vessel when copying it onto the cave wall. Nevertheless, its shape is remarkable and, presently, unparalleled. Conversely, the scale motif was widely used in various artistic media during the Hellenistic, Roman, and early Byzantine periods (Ovadiah 1980: 154–157; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 206 [J3 – Imbrication or Scale Pattern]). Based on circumstantial and epigraphic evidence (see below), the vessel and scale motif can be attributed to the 1st–3rd centuries CE.

Above the niche's double-stepped frame and plastered rectangular recess is a carved architectural motif of dentils, prevalent in Greek and Roman architecture (Robertson 1969: 47–48, 159, 383; MacDonald 1986: Ills. 80, 97, 135, 153, 159, 195–196). It is divided into two groups of four dentils each, set 0.30 m apart. In the space between the dentils and the double-stepped frame, the rock is rough and worn, suggesting it may have once had a relief decoration. Two rectangular depressions were hewn beside the dentils (ca. 15 × 10 × 15 cm). Notably, they are not aligned with the niche and might be later additions designed to hold a beam upon which to hang a curtain or a screen.

This niche with its elaborate decorative frames and panels, probably accommodated a cult statue (idol) of Ba'al Carmel, a deity identified with Zeus/Jupiter in the Roman period.[23] The decorative elements inside the cave, especially the south wall, suggest a willingness and desire to beautify its interior, employing various artistic and aesthetic devices. Altogether, archaeological considerations, literary sources, and epigraphic evidence (see below), suggest that the decorative motifs are consistent with the Roman Imperial period.

Similar caves have been recorded along the Phoenician coast from the Hellenistic period onwards, such as in Gebal/Byblos,[24] the environs of Sidon (Renan 1871: 517–519, Pl. LXV)[25] and Tyre (Renan 1871: 647–648, 653–654, 753–754).[26]

23 A similar niche topped with a conch, flanked by pillars, and equipped with cornices, was recorded in a cave at Gebal/Byblos (Renan 1864: 204, Pl. XXVIII).

24 Renan (1864: 204, Pl. XXVIII) writes: "Climbing a ravine, one finds one of the most curious remains of old Byblos. It is a structured grotto, very fine, forming a hall, surrounded by a kind of a bench cut out of the rock. The bottom extends like a cavern. This grotto was probably used for religious reunions. It is called 'Ma'arat Sahen'. The remains of stalls are seen near the entrance. The external opening was once capped by a crown of plaster, which has been thrown into the bottom of the ravine. In the middle of the eastern wall, a niche was opened in the form of a shell, analogous to the niches one sees at Baalbek, at Banias and so forth." The general resemblance between the cave in Gebal/Byblos and Elijah's Cave (the impressive size of its hall, the benches along its walls, the conch-topped niche, presumably for a cult statue, and the geopolitical connection to the Syro-Phoenician region) reinforces the latter's association with pagan ritual and its cultic function (as a temple or shrine) during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

25 Some ancient caves in the vicinity of Sidon were used to worship Astarte. Over time, these caves were converted into Christian chapels or used for other purposes.

26 Ancient caves in the neighborhood of Tyre were dedicated to Astarte and were probably used for sacred prostitution from the Hellenistic period onwards. Renan (1871: 653) described these caves as follows:

Concerning Elijah's Cave, E. Renan identifies it as the cultic centre of Ba'al Carmel: "La prétendue grotte d'Élie sur le Carmel marque peut-être le centre du vieux cultedu dieu Carmel. Les pèlerins juifs du Moyen Âge vénéraient à cet endroit l'autel d'Élie" (Renan 1871: 753–754). Similarly, C. Kopp (1929: 76) and A. Augustinovic (1972: 29–32) had surmised that Elijah's Cave was initially a centre of pagan worship. Nowadays, it has become an attractive pilgrimage site dedicated to the Prophet Elijah and sacred for Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Druze.

Of the hundreds of inscriptions engraved on the walls of Elijah's Cave, some are notably informative. Inscription No. 18, engraved in the southwest corner of the west wall during the Roman period (1st–3rd centuries CE), unequivocally indicates the cave's sanctity, its cultic function as a temple or shrine, and the prohibition of its profanation. It reads (Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 20–21, Fig. 47):[27]

ΜΝΗC[.]Η ΕΛΙ	Μνησ[θ]ῇ Ἔλι-	Remembered be Eli-
ΟC Μ[.]ΓΙCΤΟC	ος Μ[έ]γιστος	os M[e]gistos ([the] Most Mighty),
ΔΕΚΟΥ[..]ωΝ ΚΟΛ(.....)	δεκου[ρί]ων κολ(ωνίας)	decu[ri]o of the col[ony]
ΠΤΟΛΑΙΜΑ(....) ΚΥΡ[.]ΛΛω	Πτολαιμα(ΐδος), Κυρ[ί]λλῳ	of Ptolema[is], to (my) son Kyr[i]llos.
5. ΥΙω ΕΙΑΕC[.]Ο ΤωΜΗ	υἱῷ. Εἰαέσ[θ]ο τῷ μὴ	5. It is forbidden
ΛΙΕΝΟΝΤΙ Ο ΤΟΠΟC	λιένοντι ὁ τόπος	to profane the place

The words in lines 5–6 might indicate that the cave (i.e., ὁ τόπος—the place) was a sacred cultic place when Elios the *decurio*—presumably an educated person—engraved the dedicatory inscription on the wall. However, lines 4–6 can, alternatively, be read as follows:

... Κυρ[ί]λλῳ	The place should be favourable
5. υἱῷ, εἵλεως τῷ μὴ	to (my) son Kyrillos,
λι<αί>νοντι ὁ τόπος	who will not be affected any more by fever.

This reading also suggests that the cave be considered sacred on account of its healing properties. Additionally, this inscription is exceptional within the cave's epigraphic corpus on two accounts: its particular linguistic expressions and the strong religious and cultic connections it evinces with Phoenicia, in general, and Ptolemais (i.e., Acre/Acco), in particular.

"En general, ces caverns à prostitution (cf. l'aventure de Quartilla dans Pétrone) (reste d'un primitive état de promiscuité, où l'homme, comme l'animal, cherchait les caverns pour l'accouplement) sont signalées par une fenêtre grossière à côté de l'entrée (prevue que la porte se fermait), par des sieges ou des echelons à l'intérieur et par les signes V ou O à l'entrée. Dans la caverne de Gébeil et dans celle dont nous parlons en ce moment, il y a une niche pour la statue de la déesse."

27 Scholz (1822: 152) was the first to copy and publish this inscription. Unfortunately, he did so incompletely, erroneously, and without discussion. For its correct reading, see Germer-Durand 1898: 272; Leclercq 1925: col. 1496, s.v. "Graffites."

Inscription No. 21 on the cave's west wall uses the word adoration/veneration ([προσ]κύνημα), which is interesting from a religious point of view.[28] The object of adoration/veneration is probably Ba'al Carmel. This inscription offers important additional evidence for the cave's function as a pagan Roman-period temple or shrine (Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 22, Fig. 50):

ΤΟ [….]ΚΥΝΗΜΑ	Τὸ [προσ]κύνημα	The adoration/veneration
ΦΑΒΙΑΝΟΥ Κ ΑΠΟΥΝΑC	Φαβιανοῦ κ(αὶ) Ἀπουνᾶς	(of) Phabianus and Apounas
ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΟΥ[..]Θω ΚΑ[Ι.Λ..]Υ	καὶ τοῦ ου[..]θω κα[ὶ.λ..]υ	and of…… and […]u
Κ[..]Τ	κ[αὶ] τ	and
5. Τ[..]	τ[οῦ]	5. of
Κ[..] ΟΝ[.]Ι[.]Φ[….] CΤ[….]Υ	κ[αὶ] ον[.]ι[.]φ[….] στ[….]υ	and
ΤΑΦΑ[ ]	ταφα[ ]	….[ ]

On the same wall, among several other inscriptions (Nos. 23A, 24, 25), three *aediculae* topped with a pediment, were carved one above the other (Figs. 27, 28; Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 23, Fig. 52). A mutilated relief of a human figure (19 cm high) wearing a *toga* and standing on a pedestal is discernible in the middle *aedicula*. The *toga* covers the figure's legs almost to the ankles, and the feet are clearly visible. It stands firmly on both legs and is flanked by a mutilated, obscure form on its left (an altar or, perhaps, a kneeling priest before a cult statue [idol]) and a libation vessel with a high stem (*kylix*?) on its right (Fig. 28). The representation is reminiscent of standing or seated deities within or in front of temples, widely depicted on Roman coins (Ovadiah and Mucznik 2009: *passim*). This resemblance strongly suggests that the scene in the *aedicula* is a Roman-period representation of a cult statue of a god, probably of Ba'al Carmel. In fact, this is explicitly conveyed by dedicatory Inscription No. 24, engraved in the middle (smaller) *aedicula* (Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 23, Figs. 52, 53):

1. [.]ΕΟ[.] ΙΚΑCΙΑΝ	Θ]εο[ῦ] (ε)ἰκασίαν	The image of the god
2. . . ΘΕΟΔωΡΟΝ . .	. . Θεόδωρον . .	. . Theodoros . .
3. ΕΜωΗ ΑΝΕΘΗ[.]ΕΝ	ἐμωὴ ἀνέθη[κ]εν	to me dedicated.

28 The word also appears in Inscription No. 50A (Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 29, Fig. 79).

Fig. 27. The cave's west wall and the three *aediculae* (indicated by arrow) (photo: Micha Pan).

Fig. 28. A close–up view of the three *aediculae* carved one above the other; note the two defaced figures and the libation vessel (*kylix*?) depicted in the middle *aedicula* (photo: Micha Pan).

Significantly, the expression "Θεοῦ εἰκασίαν" (i.e., "the image or likeness of the god") is a purely pagan formula that was used during the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman periods (*GEL*: 484, s.v. "εἰκασία"). Effectively, it substantiates the identification of the image in the *aedicula* as a god, probably Baʿal Carmel. Furthermore, this expression, combined with the relief of the deity, unequivocally indicates the pagan character of the cave and its function as a temple or shrine during the Roman period. It can be assumed that the images' mutilation occurred following the appearance of the monotheistic religions.

At the whereabout of 1933, an inscribed votive marble foot of a statue was accidentally discovered in the garden of the Stella Maris Carmelite monastery on Mount Carmel. Currently, it is kept in the monastery's collection (Friedman 1979: 147) and has been dated to the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century CE (Fig. 29). According to the Greek inscription on its base, the statue was set up by Gaius Iulius Eutychas, a colonist of Caesarea Maritima, in honour of the Heliopolitan Zeus of the Carmel (Avi-Yonah 1952: 118; see also Galling 1953: 110–121; Eissfeldt 1954: 7–25; Ap-Thomas 1960: 146). It seems to have been colossal (3.0–3.5 m tall), but its location remains unclear.

Fig. 29. The foot of a colossal marble statue with a votive inscription, Museum of Stella Maris monastery (photo: Asher Ovadiah).

A. B. Cook (1964:117) defined an evolutionary succession of three types of mountain sanctuaries dedicated to Zeus (Mountainous Zeus): (1) those consisting of a simple altar; (2) those comprising an altar and a statue of the god; (3) those incorporating an altar and a cult statue in a temple. Based on this typological framework, M. Avi-Yonah suggested that at the time of Tacitus, the Mount Carmel sanctuary was of the first, early type, featuring only an altar. By the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century CE, as Gaius Iulius Eutychas dedicated the statue, it evolved into the second type. However, it never matured into the third type (Avi-Yonah 1952: 120). Nevertheless, Avi-Yonah's hypothesis is clearly untenable. As demonstrated above, the literary sources, archaeological data, and epigraphic evidence definitively demonstrate that Elijah's Cave functioned as a pagan temple or shrine and, therefore, evolved into Cook's third type.[29] In other words, worship and rites were performed inside the cave, perhaps until the early Byzantine period (Orosius, VII.9; Deferrari 1981: 301; see also Baudissin 1911: 234–235, n. 6). Later, in common with other mountain sanctuaries dedicated to Zeus, Baʿal Carmel was superseded by Saint Elias (i.e., Elijah; Cook 1964: 163–186; see also Avi-Yonah 1952: 120), following the prophet's association with Mount Carmel.

The visual representation of the cult statue (idol) of the god, the libation vessel, and the presumed figure of the kneeling priest (or the altar) in the *aedicula* (Fig. 28) in combination with the epigraphic evidence provided by Inscriptions Nos. 18, 21 and 24 (see above) unequivocally indicate the sanctity of Elijah's Cave and the prohibition against its profanation. Thus, it seems that in the Roman period and perhaps even earlier, the cave had been used as a pagan place of worship in honour of Baʿal Carmel, along with Pan and Eros as secondary deities (Inscription No. 149; Ovadiah and Pierri 2015: 50–51, Fig. 152).[30] Conversely, some scholars have claimed, albeit without any evidence, that the cave was originally a shrine to Adonis, the god of fecundity and spring revival.[31]

Baʿal's cult statue may have stood inside the cave since the Hellenistic period, probably in the semicircular niche in the south wall.[32] Tacitus's claim that the god

29 It should be noted that Avi-Yonah could not have been aware of this point, since at the time he wrote and published his article (1952), the cave had not yet been systematically investigated.

30 A similar syncretistic case occurred in the Roman Temple of Baalshamin at Kedesh, Upper Galilee, where Apollo was worshipped as a secondary deity under the auspices of Baalshamin, to whom the temple was dedicated (Ovadiah and Turnheim 2011: 29, 33 [n. 49], 105).

31 Augustinovic (1972: 30) writes: "Carmel: the grotto commonly called 'the School of the Prophets' or 'the Synagogue of Elijah,' held in great veneration by Jews, Christians and Moslems. Originally it was, perhaps, a shrine of Adonis, the god of fecundity and spring revival, but as a shrine of Elijah, it was well known at the time of the Crusades."

32 When the cave was converted into a mosque in the 17th century (1635), the niche that faced south-southwest, roughly aligned with Mecca and Medina, was modified into a *mihrab* (Philip of the Most Holy Trinity 1649: 119–120; Wilson n.d.: 99; Guérin 1875 [1969]: 272; Conder and Kitchener, *SWP* I, 1881: 284–285; Albert du Saint-Sauveur 1897: 139–144; Meistermann 1923: 435; Friedman 1979: 82, 136, 142–143; Giordano 1994: 92–105).

had no image or temple but only an altar (see above), strengthens the notion that the idol was not visible to worshippers since it was located inside the cave. If correct, this may explain the relationship between Elijah's Cave, as a temple or shrine to Ba'al Carmel, and the altar on the mountain mentioned by Tacitus.[33] Consequently, it seems that Mount Carmel, including Elijah's Cave, was a site for the oracle of Ba'al Carmel and his veneration and worship.

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33 A similar pattern was observed in the sacred complex at Tell er-Ras on Mount Gerizim (Ovadiah and Turnheim 2007: 21–35; 2011: 75–80).

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